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Friday, September 26, 2008

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11 kids abandoned under Nebraska safe haven law

9 siblings among children left at Omaha hospitals

TIMBERLY ROSS

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Nine siblings are among 11 children as old as 17 who were left at Omaha hospitals Wednesday under Nebraska's unique and new safe haven law, which allows caregivers to abandon babies and teenagers alike at hospitals without fear of prosecution.

The law, originally intended to protect infants, was expanded in a legislative compromise to protect any "child." Some have interpreted that to mean anyone under 19.

Gov. Dave Heineman, who signed the law, and some

other former supporters are among those now saying changes are needed.

"People are leaving them off just because they can't control them," state Sen. Arnie Stuthman, who introduced the original bill, said Thursday. "They're probably in no real danger, so it's an easy way out for the caretaker."

The nine siblings — five boys and four girls ages 1 to 17 — were left by their father, who was not identified, at Creighton University Medical Center's emergency room, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Unrelated

boys ages 11 and 15 also were surrendered Wednesday at Immanuel Medical Center.

At least 16 children have been abandoned since the law took effect in July, the state agency said.

Todd Landry, director of the state division of Children and Family Services, said that in nearly every case, the parents who left their children felt overwhelmed and had decided they didn't want to be parents anymore. None of the kids dropped off so far have been in danger, he said.

"It was the parents not wanting to continue the journey with their kids," Landry said Thursday at a news conference in Lincoln.

The department still was investigating Wednesday's drop-offs. The abandoned siblings were in no danger and it wasn't clear why their father gave them up, Landry said.

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Day care abuse sentence upheld

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By Dennis Pelham
Daily Telegram
Thu Sep 25, 2008, 03:00 PM EDT

ADRIAN, Mich. -

The Michigan Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of an Adrian day care operator who was sentenced to 30 to 90 years in prison for sexually abusing children at the business.

Douglas Jay Clark, 54, sought to challenge the prison terms handed down to him in Lenawee County Circuit Court that a judge said will protect society by keeping him locked up the rest of his life.

A one-sentence order issued Monday by the state's high court rejected Clark's application to have an appeal heard. The order said justices "are not persuaded that the questions presented should be reviewed by this court."

A similar ruling was made in April by the Michigan Court of Appeals. State appellant defender Gerald Ferry had challenged the grounds for exceeding state sentencing guidelines that called for no more than a 19-year minimum term for Clark.

An appeal application that Clark filed with the Supreme Court was based on the same sentence guideline issue, said assistant Lenawee County prosecutor Frank Riley.

"He was saying the court abused its discretion and clearly erred by exceeding the guidelines," Riley said. Both courts clearly disagreed, he said.

In sentencing Clark last year, Lenawee County Circuit Judge Harvey A. Koselka said the magnitude of the case and psychological injuries suffered by victims provided ample grounds for exceeding the guidelines.

"This is easily the worst case of child abuse I have seen in all my years on the bench and as a prosecutor," Koselka said. "The offenses are so horrendous and so many, and they affected so many lives."

Clark made no statement at his sentencing. Public defender John Glaser said he advised Clark when he pleaded guilty that he would likely receive a prison sentence that would keep him behind bars the rest of his life. He pleaded guilty and no contest to six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Clark was charged with 77 counts of sexually abusing six different children at Guardian Family Daycare, 1013 Erie St., between 2004 and his arrest by Adrian police in March last year. Police reported finding videotapes of Clark sexually abusing infants after a parent complained of suspicious activity.

During the investigation, Adrian police said they heard from people who claimed sexual abuse by Clark dating back 20 years.

Comments (0)

Foster care settlement will improve system, experts say

Posted by [cbowerm](#) September 26, 2008 10:42AM

LANSING - Settlement of a landmark children's rights lawsuit is expected to bring significant improvements to Michigan's foster care system, especially with reduced caseloads for social workers, experts say.

Under the settlement, about 200 specialists will be hired to handle the cases of 6,000 children in foster care, reducing the number of cases for current workers.

"It's a very positive endeavor for the state," said Janet Snyder, director of the Michigan Federation for Children and Families. "It requires the state to put priority on child protection and puts a greater focus on the matter."

Ismael Ahmed, director of the Department of Human Services, said that the settlement would help solve a statewide problem.

Children's Rights, a national nonprofit organization, sued the department last year after a study showed that the state's foster care system violates legal requirements to ensure permanent homes for children.

Sara Bartosz, Children's Rights senior staff attorney in New York City, said that Michigan's foster care system faces unique challenges. Of 19,000 children in the state system, about 6,000 are in temporary foster care and 7,000 are in unlicensed foster homes.

Some foster homes are unlicensed and don't receive the same financial support as licensed ones, including clothing allowances and maintenance payments, Bartosz said. The settlement would license such homes deemed suitable for children and entitle them to the same support and benefits.

Lyle Dorr, executive director of the Child and Family Services of Northeast Michigan in Alpena, said that some flaws in the system result from the large number of cases assigned to social workers.

"In a bigger system, the caseloads are higher," Dorr said. "We have 20 adoption cases turned in to us that need to be processed, but Wayne County has 2,000."

Northeastern Michigan is a small, more rural area with 30 to 36 children currently in foster care. That region of Child and Family Services has a workload ranging from 12 to 15 cases per worker, Dorr said.

So far, there have been few problems with foster homes in the region, which serves 10 counties, he said. It includes Alpena, Alcona, Crawford, Montmorency and Presque Isle counties.

More problems occur in urban areas, like Detroit, where 30 or 40 cases each can be too many for workers to handle effectively.

According to Snyder, even with a comprehensive screening process for potential foster parents - including thorough background checks and home studies - problems may surface that must be solved to ensure the safety of children and prevent abuse cases, such as the 2005 murder of Ricky Holland, a 7-year-old foster child in Williamston. His foster parents were convicted in the case.

Any small problems in a foster home can be intensified by the inability of overwhelmed social workers to pick up on warning signs, Snyder said. With more social workers and reduced caseloads, workers can focus attention on the home environment, she added.

"Reducing caseloads will only be more helpful for oversight," Snyder said. "Hopefully, it will alleviate pressure on caseworkers."

In addition, the Department of Human Services will hire more administrators to work in child care and services. They will oversee foster homes and cases in the counties with the majority of cases.

Beyond making sure social workers have a more manageable workload, Snyder said the state also needs to improve other aspects of the system.

"This plan puts a strong emphasis on permanency," she said, noting that many teenagers lack permanent homes. "There needs to be changes in expediency, permanency and safety in the system."

The settlement will be finalized Oct. 7 in federal court in Detroit before Judge Nancy Edmunds.

Snyder said, "Any improvements made in the past decade have increased attention to the foster care system. It's a very aggressive plan and a great collaborative effort for both the public and private agencies of the system."

Ahmed, the department director, said, "There have been tremendous changes in the child welfare system over the past 10 months. All steps are being taken in the right direction."

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Footer



Thursday, September 25, 2008

Michigan may be in line for longer jobless benefits

Deb Price / The Detroit News

WASHINGTON -- House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday that the House probably will vote on a stimulus package with an extension of jobless benefits on Friday.

The speaker said the stimulus bill likely would contain an extension of jobless benefits, and help for states in the form of Medicaid and infrastructure-construction dollars.

Congress is in its final days before its scheduled recess for the elections. But the need to finish the \$700 billion bailout package to deal with the financial system crisis leaves open the possibility legislators will remain in Washington longer.

Pelosi and other congressional leaders, as well as the presidential nominees, were scheduled to meet with President Bush Thursday afternoon. Pelosi said she would use the opportunity to urge Bush to support a stimulus package, which she said may be "a little more" than the originally anticipated \$50 billion.

"We hope the president sees the light now, but we intend to proceed with a very lean stimulus package," said Pelosi.

She added that "it would be very hard" for the administration to argue Wall Street needs a \$700 billion bailout while not helping the average worker who is feeling the "ramification of Wall Street's crisis" in job losses.

While Pelosi offered no details of the stimulus plan, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel proposes extending unemployment benefits for seven weeks for all states, and then on top of that another 13 weeks for states with jobless rates of 6 percent or higher.

Michigan has the highest jobless rate in the nation, at 8.9 percent. The national average is 6.1 percent.

Bush signed a bill that included a 13-week extension of jobless benefits on June 30.

That earlier extension was expected to help about 226,000 jobless workers in Michigan, whose benefits either already had been exhausted or would have been soon.

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Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080925/NATION/809250448>



Farm worker advocate job still vacant

Friday, September 26, 2008

By Federico Martinez

fmartinez@muskegonchronicle.com

WEST MICHIGAN -- A seven-month effort to fill Michigan's top migrant farm worker advocate position has so far been fruitless.

The state's latest try to fill the post of migrant affairs director crumbled after the top candidate rejected the job, said Jocelyn Vanda, director of Michigan's Interagency and Community Services department.

"After considerable discussion and thought, regrettably, the preferred candidate declined the position on 9/11/08 due to travel issues," Vanda wrote in a prepared statement. The migrant affairs office is part of the Michigan Department of Human Services, which is based in Lansing. The person hired would have to work out of an office in Lansing. The position will be reposted Oct. 1.

The director of migrant affairs is a pivotal position in Michigan. That person is responsible for monitoring how tax dollars are used to provide public housing, and services such as health and educational programs, for farm workers. The director also is charged with helping to craft state policies that deal with migrants.

"Without a knowledgeable and effective advocate in the position, basic state-administered programs such as food stamps, medical assistance and child day care could become less accessible to migrants in many Michigan counties," said Tom Thornberg, managing attorney for Michigan's Farmworker Legal Services, based in Bangor.

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